

## The Day Mr. Walker Just Walked Away

On February 27, 1935, Sam Walker and John D. Williams walked into J. L. Choate, a store in Huntersville, North Carolina with the intention of robbing the store. Soon after entering the store, both men walked out with several hundred dollars' worth of merchandise. Prior to being apprehended by police, John D. Williams was gunned down following an argument with another man, Booker T. Thompson. Sam Walker was captured by police and was tried for the robbery.

Sam Walker was sentenced to 3 to 5 years in the Pender County Prison Camp. During the first 18 months stay at the prison in Burgaw, Walker was a model inmate. But during the first 18 months of prison life, there was just one thing that Walker just could not tolerate any longer - the food. So Sam Walker decided he had to speak with Oscar Pitts, the Acting Director of the Penal Division. But Oscar Pitts was in Raleigh. So in October 1936, Sam Walker decided to walk away from the road gang and head to Raleigh.

On the way, Walker stopped in Warsaw and mailed a letter to Mr. Pitts. The letter was published in the October 3, 1936 Charlotte Observer as follows:

“You onter, Mr. Pitts:

I just thought I would notify you I am on my way thair. I left Burgaw prison and I am not trying to run off. I will tell you all about it when I get thair. I will get thair as soon as I can. I have been walking ever sence I left and I will tell you all about it.”



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Sam Walker's letter reached Raleigh before word of Mr. Walker's escape. Mr. Pitts was quoted as saying that "when Walker does show up in Raleigh, he will be sent back to serve the remainder of this sentence. He will lose whatever good time he has served and will be demoted in grade, as are all prisoners who escape."

In the 1930's, it was not unusual for an inmate to "walk away" from the prison camps. Mr. Pitts stated to reporters that "Every now and then, some prisoner with a real or imaginary grievance leaves a prison camp and walks to Raleigh to tell all about it. They know they will get a hearing from me and be treated fairly. It seems to help them get things off their minds, for many of them get the idea they are not being treated fairly, or are being discriminated against, I let them talk all they want to. Then I talk with them and usually make them see they have been in the wrong. In most cases, they see their mistakes and go back to their camps better satisfied and determined to make good records for the rest of their terms".

Mr. Pitts was out of town when Sam Walker arrived in Raleigh and Walker spoke with the Assistant Director, L. G. Whitley. During their conversation, Sam Walker could not clearly speak as to why he left on foot since the food had recently shown improvement at the prison camp. Walker was remanded to Central Prison to rest his sore feet and finish out his term.